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Wisdom Okereke Anyim

Rhema University, Aba, Nigeria, wisdomaris@gmail.com

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Cross-training and Development of Librarians for Effective Job Performance in University Libraries: Methods, Challenges and Prospects

Dr. Wisdom O. Anyim
Rhema University, Nigeria

Abstract

Cross-training exercise is very important in university library to get every staff conversant with diverse library functions in such a way librarian “A” can also do the task of librarian “B” when needs arise. This paper explored the methods, challenges or disadvantages and prospects of cross-training and development of librarians for effective job performance. It was concluded the progress and pitfalls of cross-training depends on the implementation charisma which technological and organizational culture must be put into consideration.

Keywords: Cross training, Job Performance, University Libraries, Method of Cross-training, Challenges of Cross-training, Prospects of Cross-training

1. Introduction

University library is a very important arm of the of the university that holds significant commands in the conduct of problem-solving research, learning and teaching. It serves as a knowledge resort for students, faculty and researchers who are in need of information for advancing their knowledge frontier, learning, teaching, curriculum and intellectual fitness. Salman (2018) defines university library as an essential part of the institution saddled with the responsibilities of collecting and preserving recorded human knowledge and stores it in different media. Library is maintained for the benefit of students, lecturers and for those who are conducting research or pursuing certain information. It plays a significant role in the academic life of the students and faculty members by providing learning resources for educational use for the advancement of university objective. University libraries play a central role in the academic pursuit and research activities of students, lecturers and other members of the university community (Anyim, 2020). The primary objective of university libraries is to provide support for academic programme of the university including teaching, learning, research and community services in ways consistent with, and supportive of the institution's mission and goals.

University library occupies an important position in the university with onerous tasks that require effective performance of the employees. Effective job performance in university library is evident on the quality of service delivery by librarians that leads to meeting the information needs of the users. Different measures are adopted to ensure that the library meets the plethora of demands from the library users especially now that the information technologies are creeping into the library more rapidly. Moreover, due to the cut in funding of the library and shortage of library staff, there is need for cross-training and development of librarians to make the entire workforce well positioned to perform several tasks professionally. Cross-training an employee means, training a staff to learn to do the additional tasks that are being done in his or her department or worker A learns to do the work done by worker B and worker B learns to do the tasks of worker A (Vasanthi and Basariya, 2018)

2. Effective Job Performance of Librarians in University Libraries

Effective job Performance is concerned with the relationship between inputs used to produce a service and satisfactory output or results of that service. Hose (2012) confirmed that effective job performance is the way members of the organization perform their job descriptions to attain expected outcome. Employees are expected to meet certain requirements that could be used to determine the effectiveness of their job performance. Abdullah, Bilau, Enegbuna, Ajagbe and Ali (2011) recognized the importance of job descriptions in pursuance of effective job performance and affirmed that employees perform well by following up-to-date job descriptions assigned to their positions. Effective job performance means the ability to perform library's function of selecting, acquiring, processing, organizing, preserving and conserving information resources, retrieving and disseminating of information to users with utmost professionalism. The university libraries should be proficient in utilizing every available tool to meet the users' information and curricular needs. This involves the use of human initiative, technological tools, talents and information literacy skills to diagnose and provide information solutions to students, faculty and other members of the university community.

Cross-training and development should be initiated in every university library for efficiency and effectiveness of job performance among librarians especially, in this era when information technologies have made library operations more volatile and sophisticated. Effective job performance involves a result-oriented approach which includes activities or behavior tailored toward accomplishing certain tasks with evidence of excellence. Achieving university libraries' goals and objectives is directly proportional to the job performance of librarian. Dutse (2011) posits that librarians' effective job performance could be assessed from their daily activities that involve operations such as book processing, selection, ordering, receiving, checking, stamping, classification and cataloguing, labeling, preparation for circulation, jacketing, final inspection and stacks maintenance, indexing and abstracting, preservation, shelving and shelf reading. It was believed by Ilgen and Schneider cited in Sonnentag and Frese (2001) that effective job performance is a set of actions which results are based on judgment and evaluative processes. However, job performance is evaluated based on organizational goals and objectives.

Effective job performance brings vibrancy and efficiency amongst librarians in attaining a goal and yielding of output or results (Chukwuka, 2010). Every organization including university library aims at high productivity which resulted from effective performance without which the goal and objective of the organization cannot be realized. Performance is the act of carrying out a command, duty or purpose for achieving the goals and objectives of the organization (university library). The command or action taken in carrying out a task is in accordance with the organizations requirements. Performance is defined as a way in which a person accomplishes a task that comprises his job. It indicates how the person is fulfilling the requirement of his or her position on the basis of result achieved.

In essence, performance is a cumulative effect of a person's effort as modified by his abilities and traits and by his role and perception. It can be evaluated by objective measures such as physical output or by subjective measures such as rating made by others or rating made by the individual himself.

For many organizations, the single most important personnel/human resources outcome involves the contributions that are generally called employee performance meaning how effectively an employee carries out job responsibilities and thereby making a contribution to the objectives of the organization (Anujulu, 2011)

Effective job performance is a crucial factor in the government owned university library. It is a synergistic effort between the university library and individual librarians to ensure that expectations are met and objective results are achieved in compliance with the ethics of the library. From the forgoing, effective job performance could be seen as function of behavior and result. A well-controlled behavior in an organization determines how effectively a staff carries out his or her job responsibilities and thereby affecting the overall outputs of the organization. It has been observed by several authors that the strength of any organization lies on the effective job performance of the staff that makes up the workforce.

The strength of any university library is determined by the performance of the librarians. According to Mwita (2000), employee's effective job performance is an important building block of an organization. However government owned university library cannot progress by single person's efforts but by the collective efforts of all librarians within the library. Effective job Performance is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that aims at achieving a particular result with a strong link to strategic goals of the organization. Anufulu (2011) confirmed that employees are the life wire of any organization and that effective job performance is an important building block of any organization and because of that, the administrators of university libraries should take steps to design management control mechanisms where the latent and aroused motivation of employee are effectively and immediately responded to.

Effective job performance remains at the core of any organization. Management at any level have to strive to ensure maximum use of the staff talents, abilities and knowledge to improve their organizational outcomes through cross-training and development mechanisms. Earlier studies suggested that organizations should invest heavily in human resource development interventions to updates the skill of employees in order to attain maximum job performance. Through cross-training and development, libraries can be influenced and motivate into effective job performance (Popper, 2005).

3. Concept of Cross-Training and Development

Cross-training and development of provides members of the organization or departments a learning opportunity of how to perform various functions pertaining to the department or the organization to enable them become effective performers. Training and development is an indispensable element that has tremendous effect on job performance across every organization. University library is a dynamic institution where cross-training and development programme is heavily required especially now emerging technologies are changing the ways library operations are conducted. The future of university libraries lies on how competent the librarians are in discharging their respective duties.

Cross-training and development can increase viability and technical know-how of responding to other functions when called upon. Hartzell (2010) defines training as human resources

management tools used for improving skills of the employees as to empower them enhance their job performance. Development on the other hand is defined as a continuous improvement of staff within any organization (Ugbokwe, 1998). Cross-training and development are deliberately used in this paper to focus on enhancement of librarians' competencies for achieving effective job performance. A study consulted by Anyim (2020) showed that several organizations are implementing cross-training of employees which has proved impactful in achieving competitive edge over other similar organizations as staff of the organizations can handle different functions effectively therefore, meeting the target goals of the industry. Jia-Fang (2010) supports the opinion when he opines that continuous periodic training and developing exercise impacts positively on the productivity of employees within an organization.

There is urgent cry for staff training and development occasioned by advances in Information and Communication technology especially in the area of university library operations. Librarians' training and development is a necessary approach through which the skills and competencies necessary for effective utilization of the emerging technologies are achieved among the library employees. According to Tai (2006), advances in technology have changed the pattern in which things are done in various organizations which results to changes in requirements of traits and competencies of performing different tasks.

To grapple with the contemporary advances in technologies, university libraries need more effective and enhanced training and development approaches to reposition the librarians to take advantage of the time. This training approach can transform the library into a more progressive learning environment and prepare librarians for effective service delivery. It can also make the university library to stay on top of its game in rendering effective library and information services with improved speed and accuracy. Cross-training and development program equip librarians with requisite technological competencies and skills in order to effectively utilize technical resources.

Cross-training and development is one of the approaches in human resource management that is well utilized in various organizations across the world. It is an indispensable element that has tremendous effect on service delivery (Anyim, 2020). As have been discovered by several organizations, cross-training has become an important measure of developing employees' knowledge, improving productivity and service delivery, and enabling staff exhibit positive work attitude (Okechukwu, 2012).

4. Method of Cross-Training and Development

There are several methods of cross-training and development mechanism that libraries could be adopted which are discussed below.

4.1 On-the-job training

On-the-job training also involves assigning extra tasks and responsibilities to trainees or subordinate employees by the manager or supervisor and allows him the autonomy for decision making by deliberately exposing him to challenging jobs and problem solving scenarios. According to Okechukwu (2012), on-the-job training includes instruction given to the trainees with detailed guide after which they are left to perform the assigned activities of the job. The trainer evaluates the learning ability of the trainees by assessing their abilities to follow

instruction. He further states that the trainee is provided with the opportunity to attach him or herself with the trainer to help him or her gain insights into the relationship between theory and practice.

4.2 Off –the –job training

Though off –the –job training holds great promise like on-the-job-training, it also has certain disadvantages. For instance, this method is usually more expensive than on-the-job training and it does not allow on-the-spot assessment of training effectiveness which is possible with “on-the-job” training. There are various types of off-the-job training methods summarized by Okechukwu (2012) which include vestibule training. This method of training requires that the trainee moves out of his working environment to another place where resources, facilities, conditions and other equipment similar to what are obtainable in his own work place are provided for the training. The major constrain with this method is that it’s relatively costly than other method.

4.3 Coaching and mentorship

Coaching and mentorship are also crucial in staff training. Okechukwu (2012) posits that employees directly learn from the trainer or coach, observe what the coach does and follow direct guidance of the coach. The advantage is that it allows the coach to give immediate feedback to the learners on whether they perform well or not. The managers also get themselves involved in learning to perform as much as possible, some of the supervisor’s job. The reliability of this method however depends on how much responsibility the trainer is willing to allow the subordinate to handle.

4.4 Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is another method of cross-training and development programme concerned with job that requires technical, special or diverse levels of skill and knowledge. It mostly runs in collaboration with the employees, the government and tertiary institutions like technical or vocational school) and labor unions. According to Okechukwu (2012), apprenticeship includes all kinds of trainings that are organized outside the employees’ work station. It is usually organized in a training Centre. The aim of this method is to enhance the scope of trainee’s job knowledge and expertise in order to improve on the method of operation for effective performance. It provides the trainees the opportunity of interacting with trainers who possess different skill, experience and knowledge in contrast to those they are used to back at work.

4.5 Seminar, workshop, briefing group and classroom learning

Seminar, workshop, briefing group and classroom methods are among the effective staff training methods identified by Okechukwu (2012). These are most common strategies used by the organizations in training and cross-training of their staff. It provides different group the opportunity to discuss and share views, ideas and opinion on a definite subject matter. A seminar is a medium used to stimulate the intellectual faculties of professionals. On the other hand, workshop provides practical demonstrations of what has been taught theoretically. Papers presented at these programs are constructively criticized and corrections are made. In briefing group, the trainer presents a concise paper that contains issues of technical concern or scenarios about a certain area of concern. It is assumed that the trainees have little or no idea of the issues in the paper.

The major pitfall of the above method is the variance in the abilities of trainees to articulate fast or get lost in the process. It doesn't give room for classroom interaction. The aim of this method is to impart new knowledge to the trainees. Classroom strategy is among the primary and less expensive form of training process used by different organizations. It involves the communication of precise information ideas, facts from the instructor to the trainees. One of the shortcomings of this method is the variance in the capacity of trainees to assimilate the ideas in the process.

4.6 Segregation of Duties

Separation of duties has been a long time practice in several organizations especially, in production and manufacturing companies. Service-oriented institutions such as libraries also find this management approach useful as it makes work easier. Aguolu (2008) opines that the essence of segregation of duties is that no one person should carry out three aspects of any transaction such as authorization, custodian and recording. Wittington and Pany (2008) states that management should maintain effective performance review and segregation of duties to enhance and facilitate effective implementation.

Duties should be segregated such that the work of one individual provides a crosscheck on the work of another individual". Applying this in library system yields a better result. In the university library's cataloguing and classification tasks for example, such procedure ensures uniformity, consistency and accuracy. Separation of responsibilities or duties will enable an individual to record and process a complete business transaction. When there is separation of duties, it reduces the risk of intentional manipulation, mistakes or error and increases the element of checking. Duties to be separated include those of authorization of access, execution of project and record in case of a computer based library, system maintenance and daily operation (Adeniji, 2012 p. 47-55).

Aguolu (2008) stated that no one person is in a position both to commit fraud and conceal his action by falsifying the record. A case scenario in the library is when an acquisition librarian, after acquiring the books and the proper check is done to ensure materials received are consistent with what were ordered for before stamping and accessioning of the materials, then the materials are passed to the chief cataloguer for proper cataloguing before passing them to circulation librarian for users consumption. Chukwu (2010) emphasizes more on the importance of separation of duties between departments and individuals, such that an individual staff or department does not handle a particular activity from the beginning to the end. Aguolu (2008) however, opines that there should be adequate supervisory control.

This implies that the job performed by one staff is subject to the approval of a higher official. This can be done by superior officials; scrutinizing the job of junior officers or subordinates; authorization from higher officials for a job to be performed; physical controls to ensure that specified corrective measures are carried out especially where an established control breaks down. Wittington and Pany (2008) reinstated that management should maintain effective performance review; information processing control and segregation of duties to enhance and facilitate effective implementation. Chukwu (2010) opines that effective job performance is

attainable when an institution adopts segregation of duties with clear corporate objectives, plans, policies and duties of the employee in mind. He states further that management control system should be designed in such a way that access to assets is limited to the authorized personnel to avoid being misused, damaged and stolen.

Other strategies adopted by Chukwu (2010), include that transactions must be authorized or approved by a responsible and appropriate official. For instance, over time must be authorized by an appropriate officer. Additionally, management control system should be designed to ensure that the personnel operating the system are competent, reliable, has integrity and adequately motivated to carry out the duties assigned to them. Activities carried out by all levels of personnel should be clearly laid down and communicated to the staff being supervised. When the above strategies are employed with acknowledgement and reward of librarians' exceptional job performance, it is believed that performance of librarians in their respective duties will improve significantly.

4.7 Duties Rotation

Duty rotation is a management strategy used to keep staff acquainted with activities in other departments by moving him or her from one unit of the organization to another. It involves the movement of an employee from one unit or department, task or responsibility to another after a stint in a particular department, task, responsibility for the purpose of creating a balance culture where the employees have the opportunity to acquire more skills, talents and knowledge. It is also an in-house training undergone by the members of an organization ranges from senior management staff to the lowest officers. Oparanma and Nwaeke (2015) opine that the skills and knowledge obtained from a job rotation improves productivity, and that job rotation helps management in detecting and correcting irregularities in the organization and also broaden ones outlook, knowledge, skill, and contact.

4.8 Seminar, Workshop, Briefing Group and Classroom Learning

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Cross-training and development should be a tool in the hands of the management to advance knowledge frontiers of librarians and other supporting staff in order to remain relevant in the fast changing library environment and roles in the information age. The varieties of training methods discussed above can be of great benefits to the university libraries in the following ways: The training will enhance the job performance of librarians; the training will change the attitude and mentality of the librarians to project a good image or loyalty before the library; the librarians can now work with little or no supervision with relative speed and accuracy; through the training, the old librarians would be updated therefore mitigating the risk of obsolescence. Finally, through the training, the librarians become flexible to adapt to any occasional or long term variation. Jones, George and Hill (2006) opine that the essence of training and development is to teach organizational members how to perform their current and other jobs and helping them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be effective performers.

5. Challenges of Cross-training and Development

Leads to Distraction: Cross-training makes employees be like “jack of all trade” in which they may be pulled out of the important task they have at hand without accomplishing it, and then switch to another task. Vasanthi and Basariya (2018) observed that as cross-training teaches employees something of everything; it spreads their understanding and capabilities over a wide range of skills and tasks. For this reason, a person who was hired for a specific position may lose focus compared to multi task performers.

Employee’s Lack of Enthusiasm to Work: Employees feel threatened when their job is transferred to another staff that is new in the role simply because he or she just learned the skill through cross-training. It makes the former performer of the role feel less important and this leads to lose confidence and demoralized. Vasanthi and Basariya (2018) affirmed that taking responsibilities away from one staff and handing them onto another staff can adversely affect an employee’s confidence and that could be even worse when those responsibilities are transferred to someone who just learned the skills required to perform them.

Dissatisfaction: As more job responsibilities assigned to one employee due to his multiple skills, the staff may feel overwhelmed with work making him or her to feel overused. This can lead to job dissatisfaction especial when remuneration is not commensurable to assigned tasks. According to Vasanthi and Basariya (2018), if a staff is assigned with more responsibilities, there is a chance that the staff may feel dissatisfied as more work is being pulled out from him. This may lead to employees’ aggrieved feeling being directed towards their tasks / supervisor.

6. Prospects of Cross-training and Development

Improved Multitasking Ability: Cross-training and development of employees enable staff to be acquainted with every aspect of job performed in their organization. This makes employees flexible in performing various kinds of tasks. Even when there is shortage of workforce, the organization cannot be inhibited from fulfilling their objectives as the available employees can carry out different job specifications. In the same vein, Vasanthi and Basariya (2018) asserted that “employees who can perform a variety of tasks provide flexibility and help to minimize downtime in the factory. Broad skill set of employees improves their overall value to the company and flexibility in planning work assignments.”

Self-confidence: Cross-trained employees tend to exhibit positive work attitude and self-confidence. It gives librarians sense of belonging as they can have a touch of everything that is done in their library and produce more results. Vasanthi and Basariya (2018) state that cross-trained employees feel more valuable, and they are normally more secure in their roles within the organization and as a result of strong morale; productivity often increases and employee turnover decreases.

It makes Employees' Absence Unfelt: Due to flexibility of employees in carrying out different job roles, employees who are absent from work by virtue of sickness or other emergencies can easily be covered by other employees. Flexibility of employees provides the benefit of duties coverage. Since service delivery is affected if a skilled employee is absent, cross training and development eliminates such bottleneck. Further stated, cross-trained workers can accommodate vacations, sick time and other absences without impacting delivery dates. Thus productivity will not get affected (Vasanthi and Basariya, 2018)

Cost Reduction: It is less expensive to cross-train employees than to external recruitment of new employee. University libraries can leverage on cross-training of librarians in order to reduce cost since their major challenge appears to be inadequate funding by the constituent authorities. According to Vasanthi and Basariya (2018), employees acquire new skills after attending cross training exercise; therefore, cross-training can be used as substitutes instead of recruiting fresh employees. Furthermore, changing employee roles and assigning duties to an existing workforce is always less costly than conducting an external recruitment campaign. Thus cross training reduces the running cost of the organization.

Value-Added: Cross-training leads to professional and personal growths which are altogether a value-added to the quality of service delivery in the university library. Cross-training adds value to the employee and also to the business. An employee puts more effort when more responsibilities are assigned to him or her as it helps to develop both personally and professionally (Vasanthi and Basariya, 2018)

Increased Employee Motivation: Cross-training improves motivation and promotes job satisfaction among members of the staff. The employees feel loved and recognized by their employers when they are given the opportunity to learn new skills and to advance in their professional skills. To them, cross training means a worthwhile professional growth. Vasanthi and Basariya (2018) opine that employees get motivated not only with monetary benefits but also with non-monetary recognition. Cross training of employees motivates staff to be more committed and satisfied with their job because it shows that the institution is investing the necessary values and resources for them to acquire new skills.

Improved Employees' Work Attitude: When employees enjoy their work, their work attitude improves significantly and it reflects on their job performance. Cross-training of librarians is not only intended to improve the skills of librarians but also to grant them job satisfaction. According to Vasanthi and Basariya (2018), employees will be confident when they are provided with quality cross training thus, it will have positive effect on employee morale leading them to work harder, be more productive and stay longer periods of time with the organization they are working for.

7. Conclusion

The strength of any organization dwells on the performance of the employees that make up the organization. University library can only boast of robust impact on academic life of the students and faculty when the librarians perform exceptionally in providing effective library services. Cross-training will improve librarians' job performance and the image of the library. Cross-training enables librarians to perform all the operations of the library in various library departments. The prospects of cross-training seem to be more enormous than the challenges and could be adopted for enhancing job performance of librarians. Though cross-training employees may be considered cost effective, its challenges should also be considered. Libraries should not neglect the importance of adequate staffing and the law of departmentalization of duties. Cross-training can have both positive and negative effects depending on how it is implemented. Factors like technology and culture of a university system should be considered before implanting cross-training programme.

University libraries should adopt the above methods of training to advance the knowledge frontiers of librarians and other supporting staff in order to remain relevant in the fast changing library environment and roles of librarians in the information age. The varieties of training methods discussed above can be of great benefits to the university libraries in the following ways: enhancement the job performance of librarians; improving the work attitude and mentality of the librarians to project a good image or loyalty before the library; the librarians can now work with little or no supervision with relative speed and accuracy; through cross-training, the old librarians would be updated therefore mitigating the risk of obsolesce. Finally, cross-training makes the librarians become flexible to adapt to any occasional or long term variation.

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